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The German Air Force as an International Partner

The words internationality and multinationality can't be imagined as not being in today's linguistic usage and are common to everyone. In the age of globalization, of Internet and package tours, global markets, and unlimited media, the world seems to move closer together. Missions and operations of the Bundeswehr take place almost exclusively within the framework of international coalitions where service personnel of the Luftwaffe perform their duty side by side with fellow soldiers from NATO countries and other friendly nations.

For the Bundeswehr in general and for the Luftwaffe in particular both internationality and multinationality are part of the daily normality in the soldierly life since their inception in the late 1950s. At that time, international cooperation was mainly a means of confidence building and integration into the Western community of states and the Western defence alliance, the NATO. Germany had to fundamentally establish itself as a reliable partner of the alliance. The extensive integration of Luftwaffe units into the NATO structures, the manning of billets in NATO command posts and headquar-

ters as well as the adapting of own structures to those of NATO were an essential part of the integration of the Bundeswehr in that process.

The necessary support in the buildup of the Luftwaffe automatically led to an orientation towards and leaning upon the Western neighbors and alliance partners, here primarily on the armed forces of the United States of America – as a consequence, the U.S. Air Force was the model for the new Luftwaffe. With the training of the first German jet pilots and the instructing and schooling of the soldiers of the air defence missile troops in the U.S.A. the foundation-stone was laid for a long success story of German-American cooperation which is lasting until today and which is going to be continued in future. The Luftwaffe has been operating bases in the U.S.A. for decades already, all of them collaborating with agencies of the U.S. Air Force on different levels and fields of ac-

tivity. There, the Luftwaffe is offered opportunities which it would not find in Germany itself or only under less favorable conditions. To be mentioned as examples here are the flying training and advanced training facilities and bases at Goodyear, Arizona, and at Holloman, New Mexico, as well as the German Air Force Air Defence School (today: German Air Force Tactical Training and Advanced Training Center for Air Defence Missile Service) at El Paso, Texas.

A network of very close relations is also being maintained with the Royal Air Force in Great Britain. The mutual dispatching of exchange officers, the omnipresent exchange of experiences and joint exercises belong to the daily business of the Luftwaffe just as the conduct of so-called "Airmen-to-Airmen Talks (ATATs)". These talks, which are also held with the U.S. Air Force and the Italian Air Force, take



Flying Training of German Jet Pilots at Sheppard AFB, U.S.A.

Photo: Ulrich Metternich

place under the chairmanship of the Deputy Chief of Staff, Air Force, and are prepared under the lead management of the Air Staff by the Branch for International Cooperation. In the “Operator-to-Operator Talks (OTOTs)”, which take place in addition to the ATATs, staff talks are held on the Air Staff’s Deputy Chief of Staff level (Fue L III) with South Africa, the United Arab Emirates, Israel, Spain, and Turkey. Event-related Air Force staff talks are held by the Chief of Branch Fue L III 2, inter alia within the scope of exploratory and first talks with selected partner nations.

The partnership with France is, from the German point of view, of vital interest. The German-French Defence and Security Council (GFDSC) agreed between President Charles de Gaulle and Federal Chancellor Konrad Adenauer comprises the working groups for strategy and disarmament, for legal affairs and treaty/contract matters, for arms cooperation, and for IT matters as well as the working group for military cooperation. Here, the air forces of both countries work closely together in the sub-working group “Air



Training of Thai Officers on PATRIOT Weapon System.

Photo: German Air Force

Forces”. The Chief of the Fue L III 2 Branch discharges the secretarial functions for the Air Staff’s Deputy Chief of Staff (Fue L III), acting in his capacity as German chairman. The topics dealt with here are, among other things, the use of the neighboring airspace for both exercises and in missions/operations in times of peace and crises as well as the endeavors to reach a harmonization in the matter of air trans-

port, especially with regard to the introduction of the future A400M transport aircraft. The coordination and adjustment of procedural rules (standardization) in the field of mission and logistics are also issues that are intensively worked on.

In 2007, France, Germany, The Netherlands, and Belgium signed the concept for the buildup of a multinational European Air Transport Command (EATC) allowing a joint coordination and command of the employment of military air transport means available in Europe. The EATC, which is a successful example of genuine interstate partnership, will be activated at Eindhoven, The Netherlands as of 2010.

Since 2006, the air transport project “Strategic Airlift Interim Solution” (SALIS) used by 18 NATO and EU countries isn’t less successful either. The nations involved in SALIS have each acquired a number of annual flying hours with several civilian wide-body aircraft of the type Antonov A-124 at the Leipzig/Halle airport which they can make use of within the scope of their strategic plannings. In the past



PHANTOM F-4F of the German Air Force Getting Ready for an Air Policing Mission in the Baltic States.

Photo: Ingo Bicker



Firing of Surface-to-Air Missiles by Air Defence Forces on the Island of Crete.

Photo: Peter Müller

years, Germany used SALIS for, among other things, the deployment of materiel to areas of operation (example: Congo in 2006), the exchange of major items of equipment (example: helicopters of the CH-53 type to Afghanistan), and for relief missions (example: earthquake aid in China 2008). Acting as central coordinator for all armed forces, the Fue L III 2 Branch was able to coordinate and successfully conclude the contract negotiations.

Long-standing and intensive relations also exist with our neighbors Belgium and The Netherlands, which, inter alia, are marked by sponsor- and partnerships between units and elements of the air defence missile service or by so-called exchange officers. Whereas sponsor- and partnerships include the participation and the exchange of units, elements or sub-elements in events, meetings or other joint activities, the exchanges promote both mutual understanding and trust to a particular extent. Thus, for example, a German exchange officer performs in a Dutch F-16 unit the same duty as his Dutch fellow officers for a period of two to three years. In return, a Dutch officer is employed in a flying unit of the Luftwaffe for an equivalent time period. The Luftwaffe has presently more than 40 exchange officers in the U.S.A., Great Britain, France, The Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and in Canada. Additional billets – also outside of NATO – are in the planning. Even after their return to their own country exchange officers continue to act as multipliers and enhance in this way the inter-cultural competence of the troops.

The Swiss and the Austrian Air Force cooperate very successfully with the Luftwaffe both on a trilateral level in the so-called “Alps Triangle” and also on respective bilateral levels. Mutual training offers, exchanges of experiences, and exercises as well as the support of Austria within the scope of the procurement and operation of the EUROFIGHTER weapon system including the training of crews are part of this cooperation.

Expansion after the End of the Cold War

After the fall of the wall and the end of the Cold War the spectrum of the international cooperation has greatly increased with the drastically changing political parameters. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the Luftwaffe has established numerous contacts with air forces of the former Eastern Bloc nations, primarily due to Germany’s geopolitical location in the heart of Europe and as the neighboring country of Poland and the Czech Republic. With measures of the so-called “Annual Programs” and Military Training Aid the Luftwaffe has considerably facilitated the integration of the new partners into NATO, such as Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Croatia, and Albania.

The annual programs comprise many and diverse partnership measures and multinational projects in the form of talks in panels of spe-

cialists and experts, exchanges of experiences, and information visits on subjects like flight safety, quick repair of aircraft operating surfaces (runways, taxiways, aprons), aviation medicine, joint command post work, outer space situation or training arrangements. In this context, the Luftwaffe carries out more than 80 different action programs annually on unit, formation or agency levels, in exceptional cases also on ministerial level.

The purpose of the Military Training Aid is to provide standard and advanced training to foreign air personnel, primarily to officer candidates and officers. They attend, for example, courses at the Air Force Officer School or at one of the Luftwaffe two technical schools. The Luftwaffe has conducted Military Training Aid measures since the 1960s. As an example, more than 150 officers of the Royal Thai Air Force were trained at the Air Force Officer School and have subsequently taken up studies at one of the two Bundeswehr universities. In total, the Luftwaffe has provided standard and extension training to more than 800 foreign military personnel from more than 49 countries; more than 300 of them were from the new NATO member states and trained in preparation for the membership in the alliance.

Military Training Aid requires that the foreign soldiers has a thorough knowledge of the German language which they acquire at either the Goethe institutes or at other educational establishments abroad and which needs to be proved at the Federal Office of Languages at Huerth. Knowledge and proficiency in the Ger-



German EUROFIGHTER for Exercise Flight Operations at Decimomannu on Sardinia. Photo: Peter Müller

man language are frequently the reason why this circle of individuals comes again and time again to Germany during their military career, for instance, also as a participant in the international general staff course at the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College. Based on this thought, the idea of an alumni network “Team Luftwaffe” was born in which foreign officers formerly trained in the Luftwaffe can become members and thus stay constantly in touch with the Luftwaffe and other educational establishments. First measures for this network have been successfully initiated and are concomitantly attended by the Fue L III 2 Branch.

With NATO’s last expansion rounds the process of integration has not ended yet. The new NATO states have partly still a considerable military and politico-military backlog demand for adaptations. Partners that are equipped and trained commensurate with the NATO standard are of strategic significance for Germany and Europe. Here, the Luftwaffe will still have many possibilities in the coming years to take creative action and to support the new partners within the scope of binational and multinational projects and agreements.

Against the background of the new alliance partners’ capabilities which are not fully developed yet and as an expression of alliance solidarity the Luftwaffe renders particular assistance for the maintenance of the air sovereignty rights, above all for the new member states Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Within the scope of the “NATO Air Policing Baltic States” which has been conducted since 2004, the airspace over the Baltic States is being monitored, patrolled and secured by air forces of the alliance, a task which the new NATO partners Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania are not capable yet to fully carry out all by themselves. In 2009 the Luftwaffe is, after 2005 and 2008, being in-

involved in this effort for the third time already, but with a first-time employment of the EUROFIGHTER weapon system.

Relations to More than 70 Countries all over the World

All in all, the Luftwaffe maintains relations to air forces of more than 70 different countries all over the world. It goes without saying that the intensity of the collaboration and the arrangement of the individual programs with the diverse partners vary immensely. The activities with the partners outside of the NATO alliance are focused on measures within the framework of the “Annual Programs” and the “Military Training Aid”. The Luftwaffe priorities for the international cooperation on a global scale are determined annually within a scope of action by the Chief of Staff, Air Force. To that end, he makes use of the Branch “International Cooperation Luftwaffe” (Fue L III 2) which fully considers in its work the pre-determined politico-military frame and the priorities set in affairs of foreign and security policy. This central control allows a pooling of the activities, clear setting of priorities as well as the coordination of the measures in respect to the reciprocity. A supplementary benefit results from the organizational function of the Branch as an interface of the Luftwaffe with all international partners and as a place to which friendly air forces from all over the world as well as all members of the Luftwaffe who are stationed abroad or assigned to international establishments and agencies at home can turn to. Consequently, all matters of the Luftwaffe both in conjunction with the NATO command and con-

trol structure and the Luftwaffe elements in NATO’s and EU’s Force Planning are processed and handled here on ministerial level.

Joint exercises and training projects are a central topic in international cooperation. Nearly 30 percent of the officers of the Luftwaffe participated during their period of service in training and advance training programs abroad. Aircraft of the Luftwaffe take regularly part in exercises with international participation in the U.S.A. (flag exercises). Air defence missile (surface-to-air) firing training and exercises are annually conducted on the Greek island of Crete in the Aegean Sea, and aircraft crews have an ideal exercise area at their disposal at the “Air Combat and Maneuvering Installation” (ACM) at the Italian airbase of Decimomannu on Sardinia. But members of the Luftwaffe including their flying and ground-based weapon systems can also be found with far-away partner nations such as the United Arab Emirates or South Africa as highly recognized and esteemed exercise participants which regularly prove the efficiency and professionalism of the Luftwaffe in international comparison. Aside from the participation in exercises, the Luftwaffe periodically detaches officers as observers for exercises of foreign air forces; thus, for example, to Australia, Thailand or India.

Multinational exercises like the computer-assisted upscale exercise “European Endeavor” in which 16 nations took part in spring of 2009 as well as numerous international exercises in the field of flying services or tactical evaluations (TACEVALs) by NATO with partners help to train and expand the teamwork and synergy of all air forces involved. International security at a comparably high level can only be achieved by constant exercising with each other.

The Luftwaffe cooperates with more than 70 nations worldwide. From Norway via Israel to South Africa, from Chile via Kenya to South Korea: the cooperation with the Luftwaffe is characterized by the mutual benefit, which both the partner and the Luftwaffe derive from such exercising and working together. The basic thought here is always that getting to know one another and building up confidence is of vital importance. Respecting other cultures, understanding the partner, and the chance of learning from him add to the realm of possibilities. The Luftwaffe lives the idea of multinational cooperation with great success every day. With that it is one of the supporting pillars of security and peace far beyond the frontiers of Europe. Allies became partners and partners became friends. In the good 50 years of its existence the Luftwaffe itself has grown from a student to an internationally sought-after partner. It is teacher, sponsor and promoter, it instructs, supports, and connects across borders and continents. ■

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